

Mildred O'Brien Former Member SI Dun Laoghaire and SI Bray & District, Republic of Ireland 1975-2013

Mildred O'Brien was born in Newry Co. Down, and was a member of SI Dun Laoghaire in the Republic of Ireland from 1975 until the Club closed in 2001 when she joined Bray & District. Mildred was National President from 1981/1982. She was married to Conor O'Brien and was the mother of two daughters, Susan and Judith. Mildred owned a Montessori School In Dun Laoghaire Co. Dublin, where she taught for many years.

Launch of North/South Public Speaking Competition. In 1981 DU President Northern Ireland, Miss Marie Brownlee (Bangor), and DU President Republic of Ireland Mrs. Mildred O'Brien (Dun Laoghaire and District), launched the first joint venture: a Public Speaking Competition for Girls aged 15 to 18 years.

The aims of the competition are:

- To encourage girls to play a more prominent part in public life.
- To improve the art of communication
- To encourage girls to develop the skill to speak effectively and to articulate with clarity.
- To develop self-confidence and personality.

A winner from the two areas would be selected and, in the initial year, the first prize for both winners (North and South) was a holiday together in the home of the President of SI Venice. This practice of winners going abroad to the home of a Soroptimist continued for eighteen years. Now the first prize is a voucher for educational purposes. Each year both winners address us at the North/South Joint Conference.

Inaugural Year of the Mildred O'Brien Perpetual Trophy – hosted by SI Mullingar, ROI. In 2011, the 29th year of the competition, they were delighted to award the winner of that year's competition, Anna Brennan of the Ursuline Secondary School in Thurles, with the Mildred O'Brien Perpetual Trophy. This was the inaugural year of the trophy and they were honoured to have Mildred there to present the trophy to Anna, who was invited, together with the winner of the Northern Ireland competition, to speak at the joint North/South Conference in Portadown the following May. Anna's topic was on the Environment – "There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need, but not for man's greed" (Mohandas K. Gandhi).

Mildred O'Brien was a loyal and steadfast member of Soroptimist International in the Republic of Ireland for 38 years, in Dun Laoghaire and Bray. Mildred was an outstanding National President from 1981/82, and her enduring legacy is the North/South Public Speaking Competition for Girls, set up in collaboration with Miss Marie Brownlee, President of SI Northern Ireland. Not only did this competition encourage confidence and communication skills in the participants, it was formed at the time of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, a time of great turmoil and division. This competition offered an opportunity to extend 'hands across the border', and for co-operation between the two Provinces, bringing young women together in a safe environment and giving them opportunities to make friends and broaden their horizons. Mildred was a strong driving force behind the competition in the Republic of Ireland until her death in 2013, and all participants and winners since its inception have benefitted hugely from taking part. On 9th February 2018 Moya Murphy, National Convenor, organised a reunion of past winners of the Public Speaking Competition in the RDS, Dublin, and they were shining examples of what the competition is all about.

Mildred may be gone from us, but she will never be forgotten by her fellow Soroptimists and friends across the globe, and is fondly remembered by those young women she has inspired through her legacy of the Cross Border Public Speaking Competition in Ireland.

